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AUTHOR Novak, John M.
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ABSTRACT

In order for invitational education to realize its potential as a positive, practical, and verifiable self-concept approach, it must be clearly understood by educators and educational researchers. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the general, research, practical, and theoretical concerns of invitational education. Broadly defined, invitational education is a system which intentionally invites students to perceive themselves as valuable, able, and responsible and to behave accordingly. It can be understood as a means of treating students fairly, humanely, and effectively and 'inviting' school success. The document is presented in four sections. Section one defines invitational education and focuses on two conceptual issues: (1) an analysis of invitations from the perspective of sender, receiver, and observer; and (2) justification for the practical necessity of becoming fluent in sending and receiving invitational messages. Section two offers specific suggestions for additional research on invitational education. Section three views invitational education from the point of view of the practitioner and emphasizes its potential use in solving educational problems. The final section identifies aspects of invitational education which are open to various conflicting interpretations. The concluding comment calls for additional research on the intended focus of invitational education theory in the hope that, once key theoretical issues are resolved, educational researchers can develop more substantive research methods and practical teaching strategies. (DB)

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CLARITY BEGINS AT HOME: AN ANALYSIS OF KEY IDEAS OF INVITATIONAL EDUCATION

John M. Novak

College of Education
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada

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ABSTRACT

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John M. Novak
College of Education
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada

Invitational Education aims at becoming a positive, practical and verifiable, self concept approach to teaching and learning by emphasizing the importance of sending and having received, perceived attractive and affirmative messages. This basic aim however, can become subverted by a lack of clarity on key issues. Thus this paper is intended to clarify general, research, practical and theoretical concerns.

Two general conceptual issues are dealt with in the first part. An analysis of invitations from the perspective of sender, receiver and observer is offered. In addition, a justification for the practical necessity of a fluent level is stressed. Next a definition of Invitational Education is given for the educational researcher. This is followed by some specific research suggestions.

The third section of the paper looks at Invitational Education from the point of view of the practitioner and emphasizes the usability of taking an inviting stance in solving educational problems. The final section however tries to show that the meta-theoretical interests of Invitational Education are open to various conflicting interpretations which ultimately need to be clarified.

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John M. Novak
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario

Introduction

In the past few years educators have often asked me the same question with a different intonation. Previously the question used to be stated "What is Invitational Education?" (articulated with a definite snicker and sneer.) Implied in the questioner's tone of voice was a strong protest against the already too high level of jargon pollution now present in education. This is quite understandable. However, lately the same question "What is Invitational Education?" has been asked in a more concerned but still perplexed manner by those involved in Invitational Education. This paper will attempt to address the latter intonation, concern and perplexity.

The term Invitational Education was chosen as a meaningful and more specific alternative to the overused and ambiguous phrase "Humanistic Education", which has already come to mean most anything to anybody. With such a conceptually chaotic state of affairs existing regarding "humanistic" it was thought necessary to develop a less ambiguous concept which was also affirmative, practical, amenable and verifiable (Purkey, undated).

However, in spite of good conceptual intentions, creeping ambiguities, (some obvious, some perhaps not so obvious) sometime sneak in. Thus it is the intention of this paper to attempt to point out some general conceptual confusion and suggest direction for attaining and maintaining meaningfulness in using the language of Invitational Education. In addition, this paper will examine certain issues involved in taking an inviting stance from the perspective of a researcher, pedagogist and theorist.

General Conceptual Issues

In answering the question "What is Invitational Education?" the prior question "What is an invitation?" needs to be dealt with first. In the book Inviting School Success Purkey (1978) defines an invitation as a "summary description of messages--verbal and nonverbal, formal and informal--continuously transmitted to students with the intention of informing them that they are responsible, able and valuable" (pg. 3). According to this definition an invitation is a type of deliberate, affirming message. These messages however are not free floating, readily identifiable, labelled entities and thus answering the question "Who decides what is inviting?" becomes crucial because there are obviously so many different perspectives on exactly what is, might be and should be inviting.

A message may seem to be inviting from the perspective of the sender, receiver and observer. Although there may be some overlap, these perspectives need to be delineated in order to avoid confusion.

From the perspective of the sender, a message is intended to be inviting if it is aimed at affirming a person's value, ability or responsibility and is sent in such a manner so as to respect the recipient's right to accept, reject or hold the message in abeyance. For the sake of clarity this should be called an extended intentional invitation. This extended intentional invitation may be successful or unsuccessful and may be sent with varying degrees of skill. The criteria of affirmation, respect and transmission seem to be crucial in deciding if an inviting message has been intended and extended.

From the perspective of the receiver a message is inviting if it is perceived to be affirming and attractive. If Invitational Education has its roots in perceptual psychology then the recipient's perception of a message is the essential element. For the sake of clarity this should be called a perceived invitation. Since a recipient's perception cannot be dictated but only "invited" this perspective has a built in limitation on the power of the sender. In addition, depending on the sophistication of a recipient's analysis, a message may be evaluated according to degrees of intentionality or fluency. Thus the recipient is the one who determines the invitational level of the message.

Finally, from the perspective of an observer, a transaction is deemed intentionally inviting if it is perceived to be intending affirmation and respect and is observed to be received as such. For the sake of clarity this should be called the observed inviting process. This observed inviting process may be extended to include sender acknowledgement of response suggested by Russell (undated) and the behaviour of the

sender in following up on the invitation (Novak, 1980). The inclusion of these additional steps would seem then to constitute the complete inviting process. With such observable possibilities "Invitational Education lends itself to both qualitative and quantitative analyses" (Purkey, undated, pg. 4).

Thus the question "What is inviting?" is answered with the further question "To Whom?". This final question is best answered by differentiating the perspective of the sender, receiver and observer.

A second general conceptual concern has to deal with the notion of levels of inviting. Purkey (1978) has suggested four levels, with the highest level being intentionally inviting. The suggestion of fluency (Novak, 1980) seems to point to the possibility of two more stages but has not been universally accepted (Turner, undated). The conflict over this issue may be more than "much ado about nothing", it may point to a real conceptual and practical problem--do people have to stop, reflect and develop specific inviting messages for every different situation?

If teachers are engaged in nearly one thousand interactions per day (Jackson, 1968) then it would seem impractical to specifically and intentionally invite students for any sustained period of time. Hence by emphasizing intentionality at the highest stage the conscientious practitioner may be unintentionally invited to frustration and demoralization because he or she cannot possibly live up to this expectation. If, however, a term such as fluency is emphasized, then a more general perceptual and behavioural habitual level can be aimed for. Because of

its generality, such a fluently inviting perspective could be carried to the multitude of professional interactions an educator is involved in daily. This fluency level can be seen in people learning a language. Compare the difference of someone who has to think about every word and the correct grammar with someone who is fluent in the language. Obviously the fluent person can do more and so has a higher level of skill. If there is some difficulty in fluently encoding a sentence, the person can stop, reflect and develop the specific message needed. With more fluency this will be needed less often.

The addition of fluency levels would involve a sequence which goes from fluently disinviting to fluently inviting (Novak, 1980). The six levels of inviting would emphasize, going from lowest to highest, (1) sending intended negative messages well without having to reflect beforehand, (2) sending negative messages but having to stop and reflect, (3) sending but not intending negative messages, (4) sending but not intending positive messages, (5) sending positive messages but having to stop and reflect, (6) sending intended positive messages well without having to reflect beforehand. The movement from levels 1-3 involves the removal of something negative while the movement up from levels 4-6 implies the addition of something positive.

Most probably the justification of this clarification will need to be borne out in empirical research. However, the distinction betewen intentionality and fluency is useful in working with practitioners who may continually point out the impracticality and artificiality of sustaining inviting interactions. In practicing inviting skills in

training sessions, articificality may be a necessary step to fluency.

The Researcher's Stance

What is Invitational Education to the educational researcher? If it is a fresh approach to teaching and learning it might also provide a focused approach to educational research. But what is it that researchers will focus on? Again questions seem to lead to more questions. Rather than going through an infinite regression of questions, let it be said that research in invitational education should focus on a description and analyses of messages (formal, informal, verbal and non-verbal) which are intentionally and unintentionally transmitted and/or received and appropriated by persons in institutional, interpersonal and intrapersonal settings, from the perspective of the effects these messages have on self concept development.

Research in Invitational Education then would focus on the quality and quantity of unintended and intended messages extended, received and acted upon. Without repeating the suggestions previously made to researchers (Novak, 1978), other interesting studies might examine the congruence between messages intended and extended, between messages extended and perceived, and between messages perceived and eventually acted upon. In addition researchers might examine why some invitations succeed or fail. Looking at this from the perspective of the extender would seem to emphasize assessment of skill and steps taken in deciding on, sending and following through on messages extended. From the perspective of the recipient of the message, researchers might

probe the perceived comprehensibility of the message, the receiver's judgement of the sincerity of the extender, and the receiver's assessment of the truthfulness and propriety of the message extended. A variety of obtrusive and unobtrusive measures could be used in gathering this information. At some point in time, however, it would seem that certain standard methods or instructions would need to be developed to lend credence to the whole enterprise.

Thus for the educational researcher, Invitational Education offers the possibility for focused, sustained and creative study. Researchers in Invitational Education seem only limited by their skill, imagination and patience.

The Practitioner's Stance

Moving beyond clarification and research issues, the next question to be addressed is "What does Invitational Education have to offer the practicing educator?" Certainly this is important to an approach which makes strong claims regarding its practicality (Purkey, undated).

Although Invitational Education can offer specific suggestions for "what to do on Monday" (Purkey, Snyder and Wasicsko, undated), (Purkey and Warters, undated), it is not intended to be limited to these techniques. Rather, these specific suggestions are intended to stimulate thinking and action and are seen to be derived from the basic notion that educators can intelligently and systematically choose to send messages which inform recipients that they are valuable, able

and responsible and can act accordingly. What Invitational Education offers the practitioner then is a method for thinking about and developing behaviours for educational situations. Taking this inviting perspective can enable the educator to develop reflective, interactive and evaluational system implementing skills and strategies. Each of these possibilities needs to be briefly looked at.

Using the scheme for skill development (Novak, 1980) as a guide, reflective thinking would involve an examination of basic motives, experiences, biases and environments from a perspective which aims, at least, at the elimination of disinviting messages. Interactive thinking would include looking at how trust is established, reading situations in terms of invitations needed, developing appropriate messages, checking their reception, negotiating alternatives and handling rejection. In evaluating the inviting process the practitioner attempts to determine what went right or wrong with the message, what responsibilities result by sending specific messages, and how future invitations may best be extended. Perhaps the culmination of invitational thinking is the ability to communicate it to others so that there can be cooperation in developing mutually inviting systems.

If practitioners take an inviting stance it would seem that they would view themselves as capable of sending genuine, affirming and attractive messages and their students as needing such messages. Ultimately, however, problems such as teacher limitations in sending needed messages and student overdependence on such messages needs to be examined. For the practitioner the inviting stance may offer different

possibilities but also new problems. So, who ever said it was going to be easy?

The Theorist's Stance

Finally, the basic question "What is Invitational Education?" needs to be examined from the perspective of its theoretical concerns. What kind of theory is it? What does it say about people and what they might become?

Questions such as these can be approached by using the analysis of cognitive interests developed by Jurgen Habermas (1971). According to this approach, knowledge is not value free but represents, to a great extent, one of three primary cognitive interests: the technical, the heurmaneutic and the emancipatory. Quite briefly, and without doing justice to the richness and complexity of Habermas' analysis, technical inquiry aims at producing law-like propositions which enable control in an objectified world. In dealing with human affairs this approach has been called positism or behaviourism. Heurmaneutic inquiry seeks intersubjective understanding. Phenomenological analysis is one example of this approach. Finally, emancipating inquiry "has as its fundamental interest the emancipation of individuals from law-like rules and patterns of action in 'nature' and history so that they can reflect and act on the dialectical process of creating and recreating themselves and their institutions" (Apple, 1975, pg. 120). This newest and most undeveloped type of knowledge uses the model of psychoanalysis applied to the social sphere.

According to the interpretation used, Invitational Education might fit any of these meta-theoretical perspectives. A positivistic interpretation would would view an invitation as a type behaviour. Through precise and systematic use of invitations human behaviour may be more accurately predicted and controlled. In this positivistic perspective, human beings are seen as objects to be moved using inviting techniques. Inviting skills would be chosen to give efficiency and smoothness of operation. This movement of human beings can be in any direction. Advertising uses invitations in this manner.

A heurmaneutic interpretation of invitational theory would emphasize intersubjective understanding as the essential component of the inviting process. Seen in this light, human beings behave according to how the world seems to them. The inviting process is viewed as a dialogical relationship through which humans attempt to develop behaviours which better respect and understand the subjective aspects of human existence.

Finally the emancipatory interpretation of Invitational Education would see inviting messages as the vehicle through which humans would be invited to recognize and act in accordance with their basic value, ability and responsibility. From this perspective humans are seen as co-strugglers in a quest to understand and transform distorted system of relationships which negate their worth. Invitations are seen as a means of moving towards a more inviting society.

A theory can move in many directions. This heuristic possibility adds to its richness and depth. However, when these different directions

are unstated and potentially contradictory a major meta-conceptual consensus regarding the intended focus of the theory is necessary to adjudicate these conflicts. This is presently lacking in Invitational Education.

Final Comment

What is Invitational Education?

At this point in time it seems to be an approach to teaching and learning which has a certain intuitive appeal along with creative and rich possibilities. With key theoretical issues resolved, substantive research methods developed, and practical strategies readily available, perhaps the question "What was Invitational Education?" will not be asked.

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